

Norwegian Immigration Policy and the 22 July 2011 Terrorist Attacks in Oslo

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In 2010 Norway experienced the highest immigration numbers ever. Although it was Polish and Baltic citizens that contributed the most, there was a growing skepticism about immigration in general. With the Arab Spring the fear of new waves of asylum seekers and radical Islam became hot topics in the political debate prior to the 2011 municipal elections. With the terrorists attack on the government building and the killings at the Island of Utøya 22 July the debate silenced.

Norwegian immigrant population

In 1665, Norway's population was 440 000. It had grown to one million by 1822, two million by 1890, three million by 1942 and four million by 1975. By July 2012 the fifth million was reached.¹ With a birth rate less than 2.1 in the last decades, the population growth is due to immigration, and the following key statistics summarise the present situation:

- Norway's immigrant population consists of people from 219 different countries and independent regions. They have come as

refugees, as labour migrants, to study, or to join family living in Norway.

- Immigrants and those born in Norway to immigrant parents constitute 655,000 persons or 13.1 per cent of Norway's population, among which 547,000 are immigrants and 108,000 are born in Norway to immigrant parents.
- Broken down by region, 294,000 have a European background, 163,000 persons have a background from Asia, 60,000 from Africa, 18,000 from South- and Central-America and 11,000 from North America and Oceania. 57,100 of those born in Norway to immigrants parents have an Asian background, 29,000 have parents from Europe, 19,500 from Africa and 2,600 have immigrant parents from South- and Central America.
- The majority of the immigrants are from Poland, Sweden, Germany and Lithuania. Thirty-three per cent of the immigrants have Norwegian citizenship.
- Between 1990 and 2010, a total of 471,000 non-Nordic citizens immigrated to Norway and were granted residence here. Of these, 22 per cent came as refugees, 28 per cent were labour immigrants and 11 per cent were granted residence in order to undertake education. Twenty-three per cent came to Norway due to family reunification with someone already in Norway, and 15 per cent were granted residence because they had established a family.

- Statistics Norway has published figures on those born outside Norway since the Population Census of 1865. Back then, 1.2 per cent of the total population of 1.7 million were born abroad; the majority in Sweden. By 1920, the immigrant share of the total population had increased to 2.8 per cent. During the interwar period there was little immigration, and by 1950 only 1.4 per cent of the population was born abroad. Today 11.4 per cent of the whole Norwegian population is born outside the country. In Oslo, the capital of Norway, the foreign born population is 27 per cent.²

The distribution of the immigrant population is reflected in table 1.

Table 1. Immigrant groups in Norway, 2010

Polen	52125
Sweden	31193
Pakistan	31061
Iraq	26374
Somalia	25496
Germany	22859
Vietnam	20100
Denmark	19298
Iran	16321
Turkey	15998
Bosnia-Herzegovina	15198
Russia	14873
Sri-Lanka	13772
The Phillipines	13447
United Kingdom	12843
Kosovo	12719
Thailand	12268
Afghanistan	10475
Lithuania	10341

Source: Statistics Norway

As we have seen, the largest immigrant groups in Norway come from our

neighbouring countries and the Western world. Still both the authorities and the public in Norway have become increasingly concerned about the pressure on welfare resulting from the immigration of people with low skill levels from countries in the South – particularly from Africa and Somalia. A large proportion of these newcomers have proven difficult to integrate in a labour market characterised by high demands for skills and a compressed wage structure that makes lowskilled labour comparatively expensive.

From 2007 to 2011 public expenditure on immigration and integration more than doubled, from 6,7 to 13,7 billion and in the wake of the Arab Spring, starting in Tunisia in December 2010, more asylum seekers reached Norway. In May 2011 859 persons applied for asylum, the second highest number ever, most of them from Somalia and Eritrea.³ To meet the crises in Africa, the UN High Commissioner on Refugees visited Oslo, urging Norway along with the rest of Europe to take its share.

In addition to these newcomers, 29,000 asylum seekers were waiting for their applications to be processed. Some had waited for years. The government therefore increased the staff handling administration to shorten the process. The government also introduced a stricter return policy towards those who could not document their need for protection. Many were returned by force, despite heavy protests from organisations like Amnesty International and critical remarks from the UN High Commissioner of Refugees.⁴

There was also a special focus on those who had their applications rejected be-

cause they lacked identification papers, but who refused to return voluntarily. Over the years many have left the the reception centers - unofficially the number is more than ten thousand – and became illegal immigrants.

A 25 year-old Maria Amelie, real name Madina Salamova, gave these illegal immigrants a face by publishing her book *Illegally Norwegian*, where she describes her fleeing the Russian republic of North Ossetia as a child and going underground with her parents when their asylum application was rejected. Maria Amelie somehow managed to evade Norway's immigration authorities for eight years while learning fluent Norwegian, getting a university degree and then writing her best-selling book. A weekly news magazine awarded her the title 'Norwegian of the year' in 2010.⁵

Maria Amelie called herself a paperless immigrant - someone whose asylum application has been denied and con-



25 year-old Maria Amelie, real name Madina Salamova, gave illegal immigrants in Norway a face by publishing her book "Illegally Norwegian" in 2010. Source: www.nettavisen.no
Photo:Poppe, Cornelius (SCANPIX)

sequently has no papers and no civic rights. On 12 January 2011 she was arrested, put in custody while waiting for deportation. Many of the people demonstrating against her deportation argued that paperless immigrants should be granted the right to work, pay taxes and access Norway's public health service while they wait for their situation to be resolved. For many in the same situation "Hers was a voice for the voiceless - those who are living in hiding themselves and living in a very, very difficult situation."

Yet Norway's Prime Minister, Jens Stoltenberg, stood firm. Speaking on national television, he said he understood why people were demonstrating., but added:

"... my task is to make sure we execute a fair refugee and asylum policy, so we have to treat people on an equal basis, [so] that those who are in need of protection are the ones who are allowed to stay."⁶

But critics said the government need not have bent any rules to allow Maria Amelie to stay. John Peder Egenaes, head of Amnesty International Norway pointed to the fact that "Norway is one of the few countries that never had any kind of regularization of these people's situations, while this has happened to six million people in Europe. "It basically means their status as illegal is changed to legal. And this has never happened in Norway. We are just creating a paperless underclass right now."⁷

This was a difficult situation. The Labour Party faced a right-of-centre opposition ready to attack any sign of weakness on immigration. The government's minority partner, the Socialist

Left Party was keen to ease immigration laws, which led to serious tensions within the government. However, Maria Amelie was deported to Moscow where she applied for a work permit and later returned as a legal Russian immigrant worker.

Norwegian Integration Barometer 2010

Although the Maria Amelie case aroused a lot of sympathy for the so-called 'paperless', general opinion on immigration has moved in a negative direction since 2005. According to the *Norwegian Integration Barometer 2010* (a survey on Norwegians attitude towards immigration and integration), more than half of the 1380 persons asked – 53.7 per cent – want to close the borders as compared with 45.8 in 2005. Almost half – 48.7 percent thought that integration was unsuccessful – up from 36 per cent.⁸

The reasons are many and complex and cannot be addressed here, but there are some aspects that might help to explain the negative trend: Public discussion on child marriages, male and female circumcision, the head-scarf for women, but also on school drop-outs, work drop-outs, exploitation of social benefits and international terrorism, have increased in recent years. Although only a tiny proportion of terrorist attacks in Europe have been carried out by Muslims, many Europeans – and Norwegians - share the view expressed in an election speech in 1987 by Carl I Hagen – former leader of Fremskrittspartiet (Progress Party) that “not all Muslims are terrorists, but all terrorists are Muslims.” So the debate about immigration has been polarized, and the media have mainly reported on

the extremes, often blaming ‘Islam’ and ‘the Muslims’. Although they only represent 1,5 per cent of the population, to many Norwegians the Muslims have become a threat to Norwegian cultural values and the Norwegian welfare state. This was clearly demonstrated in the report *Welfare and Migration. The Future of the Norwegian Model*, published 10 May 2011. The committee pointed to the fact that there is a steady flow of poorly qualified groups in Norwegian working life, and that many of them are unemployed: Somalis, Iraqis, Afghani- stanis, Pakistanis, Moroccans, Turkeys, Kosovos and Iranians – all Muslim countries. At the very bottom are the Somalis, with an employment rate of only 31.9 (2009).⁹

The Committee therefore strongly recommended a further development of the so-called introductory programme with a strong labour market profile – *integration through work* – and *300 hours compulsory courses* on the Norwegian language and social issues. Activation is a key word, emphasizing the need to make immigrants active contributors in society instead of passive receivers of social benefits. To reach these goals, the committee also recommended a stronger commitment by public and private sector to help integration of poor qualified immigrants in productive labour and to prevent this group from falling out of ordinary working life permanently, which would mean a substantial burden on the welfare budget.

The report created a great stir.. High-profiles individuals like Jens Ul- lteit Moe, founder of the Norwegian investment company, the Umoe Group, claimed that immigrants are a threat to

the welfare state; ¹⁰ Progress Party representative Per-Willy Amundsen claimed that immigrants are bad employers; ¹¹ while on the other side Anna-Sabina Soggiu, leader for Norwegian social workers (Fellesorganisasjonen) claimed that the report to a great extent overlooked the reasons why many immigrants did not succeed on the labour market. ¹² The report was, no doubt, a valuable contribution in outlining a policy for sustainable immigration, but I do not think I am too wrong saying that many of the proposals in the report were 'adopted' from the Progress Party's immigration policy.

Therefore in early summer 2011 immigration was a hot political issue, with

an atmosphere of anti-Muslim feeling. And most people – myself included - expected that immigration would be the main issue in the forthcoming municipal elections in September.

The Oslo Tragedy

Then – on 22 July Norway was struck by a double terrorist attack – the most serious one since World War II. A bomb exploded in Oslo destroying large parts of a government office block and there was a mass shooting at Utøya Island. 77 people were killed among them 68 young members of Norwegian Labour Party's youth wing, the AUF.

Immediately after the explosion many feared an Islamic terrorist action, and



22 July 2011: A bomb exploded in Oslo, destroying large parts of a government office block.

© Reuters

some innocent Muslims were attacked in the streets. A few hours later, when the perpetrator's name and his extreme right-wing ideas were known, the first reaction among Norwegian Muslims as well as among most Norwegians was simply relief. It was an ethnic Norwegian, born and raised in Oslo. His name and appearance burned into my mind and retina: Anders Behring Breivik. In a 1,500-page "manifesto" which he published online hours before his actions, entitled *2083: A European Declaration of Independence*, Mr. Breivik explains why he committed the killings. The text rants against Marxism, multiculturalism and globalization, and warns of what he calls Islamic Demographic Warfare. He calls for a crusade to defend his idea of Europe: "What most people still do not understand is that the ongoing Islamisation of Europe cannot be stopped before one gets to grip with the political doctrine which makes it possible," he wrote. So the target that formed in his mind was not immigrant groups, but the government itself which had opened the borders for Muslims, and young people who were attached to the ruling left-leaning Labour Party.

His lawyer, Geir Lippestad, said that "he had been politically active (Fpu) and found out himself that he did not succeed with usual political tools and so resorted to violence". In his own chilling words, the killings were "atrocious but necessary". From his own tweets, paraphrasing the English philosopher John Stuart Mill, you can glimpse his twisted certainty: "One person with a belief is equal to the force of 100,000 who have only interests."

Again, quoting his lawyer: "he wanted

a change in society, and from his perspective, he needed to force through a revolution. He wished to attack society and the structure of society." But he did not succeed. In contrast to U.S. President George Bush' "we'll hunt them down" after 9/11 Norwegian prime minister Jens Stoltenberg said "we will respond to his actions with more openness, more tolerance and more democracy".¹³

With these words Stoltenberg gained world-wide sympathy and admiration, and in Norway people across the country gathered in churches, town halls, meeting houses in a new feeling of empathy, solidarity and unity, in Oslo 200,000 people joined in the so-called Rose March in remembrance of the victims and their families.

The Utøya Effect

The tragedy also had political effects. A month before the tragedy, Norwegian voters were presented with the results from the June polls, reflecting both The Maria Amelie case and the Report on Welfare and Migration. It gave the Labour Party the lowest scores in many years – 27.8 per cent, and it was expected that the party would lose ground in the election. But the tragedy paved way for the best elections for the Labour Party in 24 years – up 4.5 per cent compared to the June polls, and 2 per cent in comparison to the 2007 elections. It is not unlikely that some of the 100,000 new voters were sympathy voters, or endorsing the way Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg had handled the tragedy. However, its coalition ally the Socialist Left Party (SV) lost even more votes after the tragedy and ended up with only 4 per cent,

down from 6 per cent in 2007. The big winners were the Conservatives, who probably took votes from the anti-immigration Progress Party once favoured by right-wing extremist Anders Behring Breivik, which lost a third of its vote, see Table 1.¹⁴

Table 1: Municipal elections 2007 - 2011 including polls June 11

	2011	June Polls	2007
Labour Party	31.6	27.2	29.6
Conservative Party	28.0	30.3	19.3
Progress Party	11.4	16.4	17.5
Centre Party	6.8	5.7	8.0
Liberal Party	6.2	4.4	5.9
Christian People's Party	5.6	5.3	6.4
Socialist Left Party	4.1	5.4	6.2

Source: Regjeringen.no

Voluntary Work

The tragedy has also given voluntary work a new meaning. Many voluntary organisations and individuals gave a helping hand during and after the tragedy at Utøya. Particularly organisations like Red Cross and Folkehjelpen – People's Help. Since the tragedy hit so many young people, many young people have also responded to the tragedy by joining these and Amnesty International and Center for Anti – Racism. The Labour Party's youth organisation has also gained several more members than usual.

And perhaps most important, there seems to be a new and more sympathetic awareness of the Muslim presence in Norway; a great number of Muslims express their feeling of belonging and

sincere commitment to Norwegian democracy. Also Muslim young men and women were killed at Utøya. Or as one who knows most about Muslims in Norway, Kari Vogt, Researcher at the Institute of Cultural Studies at the University of Oslo says: A new "us" seems to have been created.¹⁵

Anti-immigrant sentiments in Europe

Across Europe there is a strong and growing concern about immigration. It is partly fuelled by unemployment but also has its roots in threatened identity. Societies have been changing fast. There is mounting frustration that officials at both European and national level seem not to listen to the views of the voters.

With globalisation, national identity seems to have become more important. The nation state remains the focus of most people's identity, and so nationalist parties have made gains in many parts of Europe: the Freedom Party in Austria; the Flemish Block in Belgium; the Danish People's Party in Denmark; the National Front in France; the Hellenic Front in Greece; the Northern League and National Alliance in Italy; the Democrats in Sweden; the True Finns in Finland; the Party for Freedom in the Netherlands; the Swiss People's Party in Switzerland; and the Progress Party in Norway.

There are frequent expressions of concern about the growing influence of these parties. Others say that they provide a useful channel for the feelings of frustration and alienation.

An expert in European right-wing extremism at London's Kingston University, Andrea Mammone, says Breivik's ideas are consistent with many on the extreme right in Europe. "These ideas

of having a pure community, of having a white Europe are quite widespread across European right-wing extremism. They are against immigration and Islam, which is a very easy target. They are for an immigrant-free Europe.”¹⁶

K. Biswas from the magazine *the New Internationalist* says a tide has turned over the past decade. The extreme right may agree with much of Breivik’s outlook, but, they say, not with his tactics, and it is important to separate the two. “What is interesting to note is that these views are no longer fringe views,” Biswas noted, “These views are entering part of the mainstream”. But he also says that “linking Islamophobia, hostile anti-elite views to violent acts is wrong.”¹⁷

This anti-Muslimism, as a rule, equates migrants and Muslims, fosters intolerance towards communities whose religion is Islam and whose Islamic character, real or imagined, is the subject of prejudice. In many Western European societies multiculturalism has been transformed into an ideological battleground and has encouraged the growth of ‘identity politics’ across Europe.¹⁸

Some of Europe’s leaders, from Angela Merkel to David Cameron, have questioned multiculturalism. France’s deportations of Roma, Silvio Berlusconi and Nicolas Sarkozy debate on “enhanced security” in Europe’s visa-free Schengen area – meaning how to close their borders for people fleeing Africa, and the Norwegian Progress Party’s continuous talk about “covert” Islamization, are all expressions that migrants, and Muslims in particular, represent a threat to European countries and civilization. By claiming the superiority of Western culture and values, they also want to coerce others into accepting these values. However, a

much better chance of arriving at such values happens if other points of view get sufficient cultural self-confidence, political power, and opportunity to express themselves.¹⁹

In this respect, I believe, AEMI can make a difference. Representing a diversity of research centres, libraries, archives and museums dedicated to the research and dissemination of migration issues, past and present, our organisation has the potential to enhance public awareness of present migration and to prove that migration history matters.

Notes

- 1 Statistics Norway/ ssb.no
- 2 All figures provided by Statistics Norway/ ssb.no
- 3 Aftenposten.no.webarchive, 7.06.11
- 4 Ibid, 7.06.11
- 5 Lars Beranger, BBC-News, 30.01.2011
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-12309321>
- 6-7 Ibid.
- 8 <http://www.bnp.org.uk/news/anti-immigration-sentiment-rises-tolerant-norway>
- 9 NOU 2011:7, Velferd og migrasjon. Den norske modellens fremtid. Oslo 2011
- 10 <http://www.abcnheter.no/penger/oe-konomi/2011/05/23/jens-ulltveit-moe-innvandrere-uthuler-velferdsstaten>
- 11 http://178.79.186.243/artikkel/velferd_og_innvandring_dominerte_sporretimen
- 12 http://www.dagbladet.no/2011/06/20/kultur/debatt/debattinnlegg/audun_lysbakken/brochmann-utvalget/16988438/
- 13 [http://www.norway-un.org/NorwayandUN/Norwegian_Politics/Our-response-will-be-more-openness-more-democracy-/](http://www.norway-un.org/NorwayandUN/Norwegian_Politics/Our-response-will-be-more-openness-more-democracy/)
- 14 Valgresultatet 2011: <http://nrk.no/valg2011/valgresultat/>
- 15 <http://www.alsharq.de/2011/08/who-are-muslims-of-norway.html>
- 16-17 http://www.51voa.com/VOA_Standard_English/Norway-Massacre-Highlights-Europes-Growing-Far-Right-42552.html
- 18 Ruzica Cicak-Chand, Ethnic and Cultural Identity of Muslim Immigrants in Western Europe in *AEMI Journal*, Vol. 2, 2004: 112
- 19 Ibid. Reference to Bhikhu Parekh, Minorities practices and principles of toleration in *International Migration Review*, Vol. 30:1, New York 1996.